

Science and ethics in the post-political era: strategies within the Camp for Climate Action

Article (Accepted Version)

Schlembach, Raphael, Lear, Ben and Bowman, Andrew (2012) Science and ethics in the post-political era: strategies within the Camp for Climate Action. *Environmental Politics*, 21 (5). pp. 811-828. ISSN 0964-4016

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/50341/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

Copyright and reuse:

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Science and ethics in the post-political era: strategies within the Camp for Climate Action

Raphael Schlembach, University of Salford (**author's final draft copy**)

Ben Lear, Independent Researcher

Andrew Bowman, University of Manchester

Abstract

Despite a peak in activism against climate change in the UK, new environmental direct action networks have not yet received much academic attention. This article takes as a case study perhaps the most prominent of such networks – the Camp for Climate Action – which held several high-profile protest events between 2006 and 2011. Using a theoretical framework which understands society as being distinctly ‘post-political’ in character, we ask questions about the knowledge claims that form the foundations of radical environmental politics. Drawing on published statements and press releases, as well as from our insights as active participants in the Camp, we analyse the strategy of environmental protest where climate change has become its focus. The Camp for Climate Action was a contested political arena. We argue that this contestation existed over the Camp’s strategy in the context of a ‘scientised’, ‘post-political’ politics which operated within an ethical framework that prescribed individual responsibility as the primary basis for action.

Keywords: climate change, protest, post-politics, climate science, activism

In the UK, the period between 2006 and 2011 witnessed a wave of environmental direct action centred on the Camp for Climate Action (CCA). Spurred by the lack of national and international political commitment to tackling climate change despite the urgent warnings of the scientific community, ‘Climate Campers’ took action against a variety of different targets at annual protest camps and other direct action events. This took place against a background of the increasing ‘post-politicisation’ of climate governance. Drawing on the work of theorists such as Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière and Erik Swyngedouw, this article considers the unique set of constraints imposed by the post-political condition and the strategic responses which this drew from the activists.

We argue that the statements, debates and strategies associated with the CCA reveal that its moral and ethical principles were derived not so much from political positions as from a post-political understanding of the science of climate change. Though situated in a radical environmentalist discourse, these principles frequently clashed with the more overtly political, and often anarchist, ethics that were integral to the direct action movement against climate change.

Social movements, including environmental movements, advance alternative “knowledge interests” into the public arena (Eyerman and Jamison 1991, Jamison 2001). We offer some reflections on the claims of knowledge as advanced by activists within the CCA and associated groups. These claims, as well as their communication to movement sympathisers and the wider public are essential as strategic guides to action. We analyse the strategy debates within the Camp as a dynamic process, just as identity formation within social movements is always in flux (Melucci 1986, 1996). Regarding processes of contestation within movements, some have

pointed to the relevance of Bourdieu's theory of practice and 'fields' (Bourdieu 1977, 1992, Crossley 2002, pp. 168-191). In this case, we can describe a contested movement field in which there is an increasing tendency to base strategy upon science rather than political ideologies. While not framed in Bourdieu's terms, Saunders and Price (2009) and Schlembach (2011) have already analysed the CCA as a 'contested space' where different perspectives compete with each other. Our paper follows this analysis.

The research presented here derives from the authors' extensive engagement with environmental politics and active, observant participation at successive CCAs. Between us we attended all yearly camps and major CCA protests and frequently participated in their organisation, both on national and local levels. During the camps we were activists first and researchers second. We now draw upon extensive field notes, meetings and workshop reports, and countless informal discussions with climate activists. We both organised and participated in several large political discussion plenaries and workshops, addressing topics relevant to this article. In addition, we have undertaken an extensive analysis of CCA literature, from press releases and public statements to banners and pamphlets. Although the CCA was a stand-alone organisation, it was composed of activists from across the UK and as such overlapped with other environmental protest organisations, such as the anti-aviation direct action group Plane Stupid, and Climate Rush. Therefore, we occasionally extend our analysis to other relevant groups.

This article is structured around three sections. Firstly, we analyse the CCA's focus on carbon and rhetoric of urgency in a post-political framework. We take post-politics to mean a set of constraints that prevents any fundamental social criticism to flourish. It describes how alternatives to environmental governance are conceived as technical rather than political. Secondly we focus on the mobilisation of scientific rhetoric to support and ultimately direct political strategy. We relate this directly to the post-political dilemma. The promotion of a consensus around official climate science sought by some CCA activists here threatens to become a substitute for an agonistic, political perspective. Lastly, we explore the emphasis on 'personal responsibility' as a driver of social change. Our analysis suggests that while there was strength in the movement's invocation of science and 'pragmatic' political rationality, there was simultaneously a weakness in political vision. This section argues that a post-political approach to climate protest closes possibilities of political action that go beyond individual lifestyle choices and moral consumer behaviour. Within the CCA, this led to contestation over the 'right' strategy for challenging the root cause of climate change.

The Camp for Climate Action

There are a handful of academic articles studying the CCA. Authors have examined knowledge transfer between generations of activists and the adoption of direct action tactics (Plows 2008), The CCA's form as a contested space (Saunders and Price 2009), its utopianism (Skrimshire 2008), its relationship with climate science (Bowman 2010), and the negotiation of its environmental and social dimensions (Schlembach 2011). Additionally, a Political Studies Association paper (Saunders 2010) and a participant's PhD thesis (Woodsworth 2008) consider the complexities of movement growth. This contrasts with the relative wealth of research on earlier environmental protest cycles (e.g. Doherty 1999, Seel *et al.* 2000, Plows 2003, Rootes 2003).

As mentioned, we understand the CCA not as a unified organisation, but as a convergence of groups and individuals using direct action and non-hierarchical practices against

‘the root causes of climate change’. They are distinguishable from mainstream environmental NGOs by their methods, but also represent a distinct generation of activists that do not necessarily share the perspectives of the 1990s anti-roads or anti-GM campaigns.

The CCA ran annually between 2006 and 2010, attracting thousands of young campaigners and unprecedented media coverage. It presented itself as being organised around three aims – ‘low-impact living, education and high-impact direct action’ – and functioned as a base for mass direct action. An extensive programme of workshops and debates facilitated networking and strategising, while an impressive logistical operation provided a working example of low-impact and non-hierarchical living. The CCA was variably located outside the coal-fired power-stations of Drax (2006) and Kingsnorth (2008), Heathrow airport (2007), the London carbon exchange (2009) and the Royal Bank of Scotland’s Edinburgh headquarters (2010). It disbanded in 2011 to “allow new tactics, organising methods and processes to emerge in this time of whirlwind change” (CCA 2011). Skrimshire (2008, p. 14) rightly asks what an analysis of the “most confrontational of a new wave of ‘climate action’ groups” could reveal about contemporary environmentalism. The attempted synergy between ‘small action’ models of sustainability and antagonistic collective action, he argues, represents a “significant shift in emphases on the function of activism in civil society” (ibid.).

We go a step further and locate the epistemological basis of the CCA’s politics in a strong affiliation to ‘official’ climate science, the perceived urgency of the task, and a moral framework stressing individual responsibility; though we are particularly interested in how such knowledge claims were contested.

Climate action and (post-)politics

We agree with Catney and Doyle’s argument that climate change debates have become part of a “broader process of ‘post-politicisation’” (Catney and Doyle 2011, p. 178). Although there is debate as to what constitutes both the political and the post-political (Valentine 2005), points of agreement provide a useful lens through which to view the politics of climate change. The post-political context has emerged from the seeming exhaustion of all political models besides liberal capitalism, producing a condition in which antagonistic politics is being replaced by consensual governance (Crouch 2004, Badiou 2005, Laclau 2005, Rancière 2007, Žižek 1999). The parameters for this consensus

[have] been built around the inevitability of neo-liberal capitalism as an economic system, parliamentary democracy as the political ideal, humanitarianism and inclusive cosmopolitanism as a moral foundation (Swyngedouw 2008, p. 19).

Politics, defined as the contest between competing visions of society (Badiou 2005), has become synonymous with management of the status quo by experts and bureaucrats (Rancière 2007). Political projects diverging from this vision are represented as naive at best and political antagonism organised around the poles of left and right as archaic. Political parties have converged around a new political centre (Crouch 2004, Rancière 2007, p. 5)

This does not mean that politics has been eliminated. Rather, political decisions are masked. Nor has political resistance to liberal capitalism disappeared. However, resistance is either categorised as unrealistic and dismissed as dangerous and deserving of repression, or it is translated into ‘pragmatic’ policy demands. Antagonisms are treated in isolation: relevant

‘stakeholders’ are identified, knowledge claims vetted for acceptability, and an instrumental rather than political consensus is sought. Thus post-political governance actively insulates contemporary political economy from systemic critique. This creates a specific set of challenges for anti-systemic social movements.

An awareness of post-political processes is analytically useful when it comes to the politics of climate change (Catney and Doyle 2011). The (post-)politics of climate change are played out through the ‘fetishisation of carbon dioxide’ – representing the build up of carbon in the atmosphere, not the economic processes which produce it, as the source of the problem (Swyngedouw 2008). Solutions stemming from this analysis are, therefore, based around technological and market methods to manage carbon emissions (Lohmann 2008, Swyngedouw 2008). A ‘carbon consensus’ has emerged around the need to reduce carbon production within the existing capitalist framework (Pusey and Russell 2010).

At first glance the CCA was one of the most antagonistic and openly anti-capitalist social movements in the UK in recent decades and a direct challenge to this ‘carbon consensus’. However, building on previous work by Saunders and Price (2009) and Schlembach (2011) we argue that it was a contested space in which tensions within the post-political condition interacted with more radical political tendencies.

The choice of the CCA locations reflected a prioritisation of carbon over capital. As a striking example, at the 2009 Climate Camp in London, the destination for the ‘Climate Swoop’, a mass direct action attempting to occupy a coal fired power station, was put to a public vote. The key information presented to voters concerned the size of the company involved and the annual carbon emissions of each target. Other criteria were not presented. Although questions of economic power were continuously raised in the Climate Camp literature, and capitalist production processes were identified as the ‘root cause’ of climate catastrophe by many, social and political criteria were often eclipsed from the more pragmatic and concrete choices for strategic action of the CCA. Once occupied, the CCAs became sites of heated debate over strategies for dealing with climate change. A recent article analysing these debates (Schlembach 2011) shows how different political priorities within the Camp were negotiated to include both environmental and social strategies within the climate change discourse. In contrast to the outward facing anti-capitalism, many debates focused on rather less radical measures including green taxes, population control and state-imposed consumption restrictions (see for example Charsley 2007, Abbott 2009).

One of the reasons why these arguments had such traction within an outwardly anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian space stems from the unique qualities of climate change as a social movement ‘issue’ and a matter of ‘urgency’. The trumping of politics by climate temporality was best demonstrated by the different perspectives towards government and the state within the Camp. At the 2009 Blackheath CCA, one of the best attended and hotly contested plenary sessions was a discussion about the movement’s relationship to the state, making clear the divisions within the Camp on this subject, with many claiming that green taxes, at the least, would be required to solve the climate crisis in time (Abbott 2009). Many CCA activists argued that with the likelihood of climatic ‘tipping points’ being reached within less than ten years there may not be time for the type of radical politics that the Camp officially endorsed, and the perceived long and slow process of dismantling capitalism and replacing it with a more equitable system. Whilst some argued that the state’s systemic function is to protect capital accumulation and that this is in fundamental contradiction to sustainable development, others argued that, given time constraints, the only ‘realistic choice’ was to encourage the state to

enforce carbon reductions. According to this position, the goal of a more egalitarian society free from government control would have to be postponed until the problem of climate change is solved.

As actors in a post-political society that condemns ideological debate to the fringes and favours the administration of ‘technical’ problems, the CCA participants’ practical political programmes did often not go beyond a commitment to tackling climate change. Behind much of the rhetoric emblazoned on the banners and publicity material, knowledge claims were rarely based on political values. Much of the campaign strategy became a focus on greenhouse gas emissions, largely abstracted from the social and economic conditions in which they were produced. Whilst the Camp was clearly an attempt at developing an antagonistic climate change politics, we must recognise the difficulties that it faced in attempting to realise this goal whilst operating both within and against the post-political climate consensus. Indeed, the history of Climate Camp can be read as a struggle between more radical positions focused on capital and positions influenced by wider social actors that derive their strategies to tackle climate change from official climate science.

Climate action and science

There is something very specific, of course, to the campaigning against climate change: that is the relationship of activism to science. In the official discourse, science can serve to further technocratic, consensual, and hence post-political, approaches to tackling global warming. Science is, as Ulrich Beck observed, “frequently implicated as cause, medium of definition and source of solution to the environmental crisis” (Beck 1992, p. 155). Unlike most environmental problems which attract protest, it would be impossible to understand climate change as anything other than a localised and causally ambiguous phenomenon without a huge scientific infrastructure such as is available only to the governments and research organisations of the industrialised world. Climate science has concurrently had a major effect on environmental movements which address the issue, with carbon-counting coming to shape political debates and strategies in ways which will be explored below.¹

First though, we shall examine academic discussions about the relationship between climate science and climate policy, where perennial debates over the role of scientists in policy making have been particularly fraught. There has been a widespread expectation that climate change policy should be ‘science-driven’, with solutions following rationally from shared acknowledgement of facts (King 2005, Soroos 2004). However, climate science is an exemplar of what Jerome Ravetz calls “post-normal” science, where “typically facts are uncertain, values in dispute, stakes high and decisions urgent”, and as such invites conflict (Ravetz 2004, p. 349). A variety of actors have sought to advance different policy agendas through claims to holding a correct interpretation of ‘the science’. Most notably, the US Republican Party and oil industry

¹ A close relationship between environmental protest and science is of course nothing new, with most previous environmental protests involving a heavy emphasis on science communication (Yearley 1996 and 2008). However, a key difference, we argue, regarding climate protest is firstly the degree of reliance upon science, and secondly the manner in which protesters have attempted to bolster rather than undermine official scientific prognoses. Previous science-based environmental protests, such as around GM for example, instead predominately involved activists turning to dissident or non-mainstream scientists (Levidow 1999)

allies have supported a small number of scientists questioning the existence of anthropogenic climate change (Oreskes and Conway 2010).

Quandaries over which scientists to trust spurred the creation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in the 1980s, which every five years creates a report conveying a consensus scientific opinion on the causes, character and impacts of climate change, allowing parties with divergent political and economic interests to find the basis for commonly agreed solutions to climate change (Bolin 2007). The IPCC, however, has not been free from criticism. The University of East Anglia email scandal preceding the Copenhagen COP15 provided ammunition to critics who saw climate change as an exaggerated threat created by self-interested scientists excluding dissenting opinions through IPCC bureaucracy (Gagnier 2010).

Besides the so-called ‘climate sceptics’, a range of academics have suggested ways in which climate policy and science might be more closely aligned than at present under the IPCC (Hulme 2010, Webster *et al.* 2011). Iterative and sequential policymaking processes in which the barriers at the interface between climate science and policy are diminished, it is suggested, would result in more frequent policy shifts as new scientific evidence emerges (Parson and Karwat 2011, Weichselgartner and Kaspersen 2010).

Common to most discussions of how to create a better fit between climate science and policy is the assumption that scientific consensus could and should foster political consensus: that states would set aside political priorities and defer to the epistemic communities assembled around the issue of climate change to outline policy options (Haas 1992). As Latour has said, science in the political arena has been expected to “bring order to [society] with incontestable findings that will silence the endless chatter of the mob” (Latour 2004, p. 11) – expectations that much resonate with the post-political frameworks of consensus that we have outlined above. Correspondingly, there has been a tendency in climate policy discussions – from scientists and non-expert policymakers – to downplay scientific uncertainty relating to climate change (O’Reilly *et al.* 2011, Shackley and Wynne 1996).

However, as Latour and others have observed (Beck 2009), the distinction between facts and values in the political arena frequently becomes blurred. Science never entirely replaces politics, but is frequently employed to conceal it. As Hulme points out, climate science has been used “to justify claims not merely about how the world is [...] but about what is or is not desirable – about how the world should be” (Hulme 2009, p. 74). This leads not only to science itself becoming a source of disagreement, but also to a debasement of the political dimensions of climate policy debates.

There is much common ground in the issues facing climate policymakers and the climate activists referred to here in their dealings with science. The CCA similarly sought to both inform its strategy and confer legitimacy on its actions through scientific evidence, and it has encountered similar problems in terms of where to draw the science-politics divide. There is a crucial distinction though. Policymakers may actively seek in science a means of making climate change a technical problem in which, for example, inequalities in wealth and power are largely irrelevant. For many radical climate protest groups, the politicisation of climate change is a *raison d’être* – at least in principle: their activity serves to highlight how imbalances in wealth and power are integral to the climate crisis.

However, science came to be both shield and bludgeon for CCA activists, with significant consequences. This was most apparent in media performances when pitted against fossil fuel industry opponents. Questions over the purpose, efficacy and legitimacy of protesters’ actions were met with a barrage of statistics and official report titles. Rather than employing a

unitary 'climate science' as suggested by 'the science says...' rhetoric, protesters selected particular intellectual figureheads based around a combination of their social prestige and political leanings. Most significant was the NASA climate scientist James Hansen, who claimed that "the democratic process doesn't quite seem to be working" in terms of limiting emissions, and suggested "that young people, especially, should be doing whatever is necessary to block construction of dirty (no CCS) coal-fired power plants" (see Clark 2007, Adams 2009). His comments were repeatedly reproduced by direct action climate activists. One organisation linked to the CCA dubbed him "a cool Granddad", saying "if you're doing stuff [protests] around coal and want backup from the pre-eminent climate scientist in the world [sic.], maybe drop a few Hansen quotes into your press releases [and] legal defence" (The Coal Hole 2010). As with Hansen, the appropriation of Al Gore's perceived authority became important to activists' knowledge claims. His statement, "I can't understand why there aren't rings of young people blocking bulldozers and preventing them from constructing coal-fired power plants", fitted perfectly with the Climate Camp's and Greenpeace's Kingsnorth campaign (Greenpeace UK 2010).

The use of scientific authority as a means of deflecting elite criticism often fed into an overt de-politicisation of strategy. Joss Garman, for instance, co-founder of the influential anti-aviation direct action group Plane Stupid, responded to suggestions that climate change protests were tokenistic, by stating in *The Guardian*:

They say the Sixties was the anti-war decade; the Seventies saw marches against racism at home and apartheid abroad; if it's the Eighties it must be Ban the Bomb and Maggie Out; the Nineties was roads and anti-globalisation; and the Noughties, this decade, is about climate change. We'll soon be on to something else, right? Wrong. [...] this isn't about ideals so much as hard science [...]. We know how this story ends, but not because we've read obscure economic treatises or dense theories from Friedman and Hayek or Hobsbawm and Marx. We know because scientists are providing measurable objective evidence that the high-carbon economic model has an in-built self-destruct mechanism (Garman 2009).

Through this scientisation of political strategy, carbon counting came to eclipse radical political imperatives which existed in the Climate Camps' discursive space.

Numerous examples bear this out. In the most remarkable, military air bases were targeted not because of their function, but because the function could be more energy efficient. A spokesperson stated that regardless of the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan, "there is still the large amount of unnecessary flying. Often the planes will do 'touch and goes' [sic.] where they land and then take off several times. These are needless emissions of carbon dioxide" (CCA 2008b).

In 2007, protestors blockaded the Department for Transport because of their failure to appreciate the significance of aviation to overall CO₂ emission levels (CCA 2007a). In the same year, the staff of BAA, the UK's largest airport owner, were locked in their offices with a pile of scientific reports thrown in by protesters wielding a 'read the science' banner (Plane Stupid 2007). In 2009, the street in front of the London carbon exchange was occupied, the CCA announced, because carbon trading would "defy science" (CCA 2009). The location of the camps was also justified primarily by science. In 2006 Drax coal-fired power-station in Yorkshire was picked because it was the largest single point-source of CO₂ emissions in the UK (CCA 2007b). In 2007, Heathrow airport was chosen firstly because "the effect of Heathrow's

planes on the climate is equivalent to 31 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions per-year”, and secondly because aviation was the single fastest growing source of CO₂ emissions in the UK (CCA 2007b). In 2008, Kingsnorth coal power station in Kent was chosen, “firstly because it emits 10 million tons CO₂ a year”, and secondly to oppose the new station being built there, highlighting coal as the most carbon-intensive form of power generation (CCA 2008c). In 2010 the CCA was located adjacent to the RBS headquarters in Edinburgh. In the initial publicity for the camp the bank’s £50 billion bail-out was briefly mentioned before discussing the main reason for the target: “[t]his bank is one of the world’s largest investor in oil, gas and coal” (CCA 2010). Fittingly, the main march of the 2007 camp left under the banner “we are armed only with peer-reviewed science.” Behind, protesters carried pages of a Tyndall Centre report on aviation above their heads (Indymedia UK 2007). The moment encapsulated a key strength of the protest, but also a key weakness. Being “armed only with peer-reviewed science”, suggests a weak arsenal of political, economic and ethical arguments. Besides this science is, as the sociologist Steven Yearley (1992) asserts, an “unreliable friend” in the political arena. Actually-existing science is a messier affair than the enlightenment ideal. Truth claims are contingent, based on continual uncertainty, and subject to continual revision or refutation. As any rummage through its history shows, actually-existing science is frequently no less subject to social pressures than other human endeavours – an issue that has been painfully exposed as the ‘climategate’ scandal has unfolded

The scientised politics of climate change employed by the CCA in some of its literature and strategic decisions and in that of other associated protest groups meant a narrowing of political horizons. In order to more closely adhere to ‘the science’, arguments which did not rest upon the foundation of quantifiable evidence were discredited. Thus, rather than political goals being informed by science, compliance with science became the goal in itself.

Climate action and ethics

There has always been something cultural about the practices of environmental social movements, so a post-political element to their strategic outlook is maybe not that surprising. What binds the members of sub-political groups and movements is also a way of doing things, and an outlook on new forms of social behaviour and living. Paul Chatterton, a human geographer and climate activist, described the Camp for Climate Action as “not just about climate change; it is about people’s ability to manage their own lives. There is no off-the-shelf model for learning to live without relying on politicians and corporations” (cited in Readhead 2007). Moral claims in social movements rest on the assumption that a change in collective behaviour, seen as the sum of individual actions, can result in a fundamental change in society. Here, the literature on collective behaviour and new social movements is insightful. Herbert Blumer, for example, has defined social movements not just in terms of their opposition to current politics and policies, but in terms of their attempts “to establish a new order of life”, motivated by the “wishes and hopes for a new scheme or system of living” (Blumer 1969, p. 99). The development of camaraderie in movements precedes ideological and political affinity and is a result of social interactions that produce new values, morals and meanings. Other authors acknowledging this stress the importance of communication, commonality and identity for movement mobilisation (Touraine 1981, Melucci 1986, 1996, Habermas 1987).

As perceptive as such analyses might be, they are not without fundamental criticisms. There have always been engaged rejections of notions of collective action that are connected to

lifestyle, identity and ethical behaviour. Some of the hardest hitting arguments were brought against French (student) militants by members of the Situationist International in the 1960s. Situationist writers denounced militancy as a form of sacrifice and martyrdom, and argued that the presumed scientific or political knowledge informing militant behaviour led to an analysis of the world which required leadership: the individual gains authority through proof of her moral lifestyle, assuming the position of an expert in revolutionary change. Raoul Vaneigem (1994, p. 109) wrote of the “young leftist radicals”:

They become militants, fetishising action because others are doing their thinking for them. Sacrifice seems to have an endless series of tricks up its sleeve. [...] Great despisers of life that they are [...] the partisans of absolute self-sacrifice [...] their lives twisted by their monstrous asceticism.

The Situationist analysis was not solely directed against lifestyle militancy, but was understood in the context of strong Maoist tendencies within the French student movement. Nonetheless, its critique has also featured in discussions within contemporary anti-capitalist movements (for example Andrew X. 1999).

Ethical consumerism and asceticism are at the heart of today’s climate action movements, and various high-profile campaigns consciously seek change in personal consumption patterns rather than radical social change. The 10:10 campaign, for example, which has attracted support from corporations, public sector institutions and a long list of celebrities, suggests individuals and organisations should carry out a carbon audit and reduce their CO₂ emissions by ten percent in one year (for a critique of the initiative’s a-political nature, see Dobson 2009). Journalist and environmental campaigner George Monbiot has gone so far as to use the platform at the CCA to call for a stronger regulatory state, pushed forward by ‘riots for austerity’; echoing his earlier proposal to put pressure on government to restrict consumption: “People don’t riot for austerity; they riot because they want more, not less. We have to riot for less” (cited in Mason 2004). In its most extreme – and increasingly polarised – version, the call to action against carbon takes the form of agitation not against consumerism but against people as polluters *per se*. The Optimum Population Trust, which benefits from the endorsement by prominent environmentalists such as Paul Ehrlich, Jonathan Porritt and David Attenborough, proposes an offset scheme by which carbon-intensive lifestyles in developed countries can be measured against the projected consumption of people in developing countries. Western consumers can thus pay to offset their emissions by funding family planning schemes in Asia or Africa (on the Optimum Population Trust see Lockhart 2009). With such campaigns, the foregrounding of a consensual, individualising politics of carbon successfully hides the concrete economic and political processes which had brought these issues into being. Antagonistic social movements, especially in the Global South, appear to concede political prominence to more universalising campaigns, with tendencies to divorce issues of human welfare from climate change (Catney and Doyle 2011). These campaigns avoid creating political conflict and, rather, focus on points of consensus regarding individual behavioural change.

The argument for holding the 2007 CCA at Heathrow Airport, near the village of Sipson which would be destroyed by a third runway, was certainly viewed from a scientific perspective as we have argued above. Yet, it also carried a strong moral angle, which we see as derived from a post-political action framework. In the context of consumer flights, this entered the arena of individual behaviour, contrasting ‘ethical’ lifestyle decisions with ‘unethical’ ones. It was a

compelling argument. Our consumer choices would directly impact on the lives of the Sipson villagers. More so than the other camps situated outside coal-fired power plants, this second CCA lay at the intersection of a moral denunciation of consumer behaviour and of a radical critique of power in society. Ethically, the arguments at the Heathrow camp were situated within the sphere of the individual. A prominent actor within the Camp's organising process was the anti-aviation group Plane Stupid, which calls for an end to short haul flights by curbing demand through taxes and restrictions. Its action repertoire includes high profile stunts, often intended to attract media attention. They have invaded the taxiway of Stansted airport, climbed the roof of the Houses of Parliament, and thrown green custard at then business secretary Peter Mandelson. While Plane Stupid tends to be recognised as a direct action group, its protests have a strong focus on publicity generation. Moreover, it has distanced itself at times from other direct action activists who have coupled campaigning around particular issues with criticisms of capitalist society. One Plane Stupid activist explains:

The problem with explicitly anti-capitalist movements is that they are slightly intangible to grasp. The media doesn't know what to make of them, and usually jump at the first opportunity to smear them. The advantage of being single issue is that you can have clearly defined aims and proposed solutions that people can grasp, discuss and debate (Gillett 2008).

Nonetheless, politically as well as personally, there are strong overlaps with the radical environmental direct action movement with anarchist leanings and specifically with the Climate Camp.

The evocation of public guilt and moral outrage about flying habits did not constitute the prime objective for the Heathrow camp, however. CCA also sought to advance arguments against the unequal distribution of power in society as one of the root causes of climate change. The two sometimes sat uneasily together. From the start, there was a mixture of calls for a change in lifestyles and for political, collective action. The Camp's aims as stated on its website at the time proclaimed: "Yes we need to change light bulbs and stop flying to Spain for the weekend, but we also need to act collectively" (CCA 2007c). Yet, publicly the message remained: 'Fly less'. A prominent banner illustrated this with the slogan 'Make Planes History'. A day of mass action did show the limitations of a moralistic position. With the national media anticipating a dramatic attempt to disrupt, or shut down, the operation of the airport, the camp plenum settled for the less controversial option of laying siege to BAA's corporate offices. Individual passengers were not targeted.

Despite this, some participants and camp organisers lamented that the focus on individual responsibility for battling runaway climate change overlooked a relationship that existed between the ecological and the social – i.e. between climate change and society's collective decisions. Specifically, the emphasis on a personal reduction in carbon emissions was contested. For example, another banner at the camp read 'Social Change not Lifestyle Change', clearly making the case against the focus on change in individual consumer behaviour. One climate activist commented that

the camp put major emphasis on lifestyle change, even though most passers by could tell us that it is impossible to live sustainably in today's society. Compost toilets and grey water systems are not things that the majority of the general public can opt into, so what

remained was the demand for them to opt out of other actions, such as flying. Hence, one message of the camp appeared to be a call to 'riot for austerity', in contrast to calls that have historically rallied mass movements around a desire for prosperity (Charsley 2007).

Another participant, writing after the 2008 Kingsnorth camp put it like this:

Carbon emissions became a hot topic, but in the context of the above, only as 'footprints' to feel guilty about. Indeed, some campers were hoping for this. On the Thursday morning, I had a discussion with an activist about his ambitions for what is being dubbed the 'climate movement'. "To make a lot of people very guilty", he replied. This emphasis on guilt as a precursor for individualistic lifestyle change is perhaps the very opposite of what many original organisers hoped for (Ford 2008).

Despite our focus on debate and conflict, we do not want to overstate the tensions that existed within the Climate Camp process. Political disagreements were usually resolved through informal arrangements and seldom transcend into wider organisational and activist arenas. However, they do reveal that ethical and strategic guidelines for action were frequently based upon a consideration of climate science. Despite the radical conclusions drawn from these, a post-political framework of understanding clearly played a large role within the CCA and associated direct action campaigning.

Conclusions

We have made the argument that the CCA represents a space in which post-political perspectives compete with more explicit forms of political action. This contestation emerges at the confluence of governance as a society-wide process and the actual specifics of climate change as a movement issue. As such the scientific/post-political positions and their anti-systemic/political challenges do not stand on equal footing. Rather, social movements aiming to 'politicise' the issue of climate change face a post-political consensus that reduces it to a technical-environmental problem.

This article has argued that within the CCA, this 'scientisation' represents a departure from the knowledge claims of a previous generation of direct action environmentalists. Environmentalism has always been shaped by its twofold approach to science. On the one hand science provided the facts to explain the relationship of nature and society. On the other hand, the approach was shaped by an emphasis on post-materiality. Yet, the relationship of individual spirituality to nature allowed for an ethical framework unlike that dictated by scientific rationality.

Therefore, the way that climate activism has at times taken a post-political turn also signals a change in the reception of scientific claims in moral terms. With climate scientists generally considered friend not foe, hard fact science now provides the climate action movement with the moral and ethical framework to inform collective action, but also to prescribe individual behaviour and personal responsibility. These shifts are however not universally accepted and are taking place in a contested space. As Saunders (2008) shows, environmental movements do not share one overarching identity but incorporate multiple group bonds and subsets of behaviour patterns. The CCA was such a contested space where various political generations and perspectives interacted.

Nonetheless, within this space a distinct set of political co-ordinates have emerged, which, we believe, are not unproblematic. Whilst the embracing of scientific knowledge and expertise makes possible an intervention into national and international policy issues, it risks an over-reliance on elite structures of knowledge production that grassroots movements have little access to. The ‘fetishisation’ of carbon-counting that we have referred to throughout the article suggests that climate change can become viewed as a scientific problem outside of a social context; akin to elite discourses that seek technocratic, rather than social and political, solutions. If scientific knowledge becomes a replacement for political vision, issues of social justice and political emancipation risk being subsumed within an apocalyptic temporality in which politics must cede to consensual pragmatics. Finally, an appeal to individual action and consumer behaviour is likely to be recuperated within this logic and limits the range of collective repertoires available to activists. Again, moral action cannot be abstracted from its political context.

There are wider inferences which can be drawn for social movements from this initial research. We see the trinity of science, politics and ethics/morals as useful starting points from which to investigate the basis for collective action more broadly. It is apparent that the knowledge claims put forward by social movements are dynamic and related to social and historical changes. We must assume that environmental movements in general, but also activism focused on other progressive issues, are continuously influenced by changing contestations and epistemologies. As we head deeper into environmental and socio-economic crisis the forms of contestation which social movements produce is crucial to the possibility of progressive social change.

Acknowledgements:

This article is a much revised version of a paper presented to the 15th Alternative Futures and Popular Protest conference at Manchester Metropolitan University, 2010. We are grateful for the supporting comments we received there. We would also like to acknowledge the helpful suggestions we received from the three anonymous reviewers of this article.

References

- Abbott, D., 2009. The State Climate Camp's In, *Mute Magazine* [online], http://www.metamute.org/en/content/the_state_climate_camps_in [Accessed 11 May 2011].
- Adams, D., 2009. Leading climate scientist: 'democratic process isn't working'. *The Guardian* [online], <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2009/mar/18/nasa-climate-change-james-hansen> [Accessed 11 May 2011].
- Andrew X., 1999. Give Up Activism. In: Reclaim The Streets, eds. *Reflections on J18*. London: RTS, 2-6.
- Badiou, A., 2005. *Meta-Politics*. London: Verso.
- Beck, U., 1992. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage.
- Beck, U., 2009. *World at Risk*. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Blumer, H., 1969. Collective Behaviour. In: A. McClung-Lee, ed.. *Principles of Sociology*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 67-121.
- Bolin, B., 2007. *A history of the science and politics of climate change: the role of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., 1992. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bowman A., 2010. Are we armed only with peer-reviewed science? The scientization of politics in the radical environmental movement. In: S. Skrimshire ed. *Future ethics: climate change and the apocalyptic imagination*. London: Continuum, 173 – 196.
- Camp For Climate Action, 2007a. Climate Activists Blockade Department for Transport to Stope Airport Expansion [online] <http://www.climatecamp.org.uk/themes/ccamptheme/files/pr2007.pdf> [Accessed 11 May 2011].
- Camp for Climate Action, 2007b. Press Release: Last Year Drax. This Year Heathrow: Camp for Climate Action announces this year's target [online]. http://www.climatecamp.org.uk/themes/ccamptheme/files/pressrelease24_05_07.php [Accessed 11 May 2011].
- Camp for Climate Action, 2007c. Aims of the Camp for Climate Action [online]. <http://web.archive.org/web/20070827224047/www.climatecamp.org.uk/aims.php> [Accessed 14 May 2011].

Camp for Climate Action, 2008a. Press Release: Royal Bank of Scotland Targeted by Climate Camp Activists for the Second Day Running [online]. <http://climatecamp.org.uk/node/430> [Accessed 12 May 2011].

Camp for Climate Action, 2008b. Press Release: Climate Camp Activists Dressed As Planes Target Mildenhall Military Base [online]. <https://www.earthfirst.org.uk/actionreports/node/21212> [Accessed 11 May 2011].

Camp for Climate Action, 2008c. Press Release: Thousands to take direct action against Kingsnorth power station [online]. <http://www.climatecamp.org.uk/themes/ccamptheme/files/pr19-06-08.pdf> [Accessed 12 May 2011].

Camp for Climate Action, 2009. Press Release: Climate Campers to target the carbon market, “because nature doesn't do bail outs” [online]. <http://climatecamp.org.uk/themes/ccamptheme/files/pr5-2-09.pdf> [Accessed 11 May 2011].

Camp for Climate Action, 2010. Camp for Climate Action 2010: Break the Bank [online]. <http://climatecamp.org.uk/actions/edinburgh-2010> [Accessed 11 May 2011].

Camp for Climate Action, 2011. Metamorphosis: a Statement from the Camp for Climate Action [online]. <http://climatecamp.org.uk/2011-statement> [Accessed 1 November 2011].

Catney, P. and Doyle, T., 2011. The Welfare of now and the Green (Post)politics of the Future. *Critical Social Policy*, 31(2), 174-194.

Charsley, J., 2007. Climate Camp Hijacked by a Hardcore of Liberals, *Shift Magazine* 1, 17-19.

Clark, G., 2007. Al Gore, James Hansen and Civil Disobedience. *Zcommunications* [online]. <http://www.zcommunications.org/al-gore-james-hansen-and-civil-disobedience-by-gordon-clark> [Accessed 11 May 2011].

Crossley, N., 2002. *Making Sense of Social Movements*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Crouch, C., 2004. *Post-Democracy*. Oxford: Polity.

Dobson, A., 2009. 10:10 and the Politics of Climate Change. *OpenDemocracy* [online]. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/10-10-and-the-politics-of-climate-change> [Accessed 11 May 2011].

Doherty, B., 1999. Paving the Way: the Rise of Direct Action and the Changing Character of British Environmentalism. *Political Studies*, (47) 2, 275-291.

Eyerman, R. and Jamison, A., 1991. *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach*. Cambridge: Polity.

Ford, A., 2008. 'Climate Camp and Class', *Shift Magazine* 4, 4-7.

Gagnier, D., 2010. Climategate: bad science, red herring or political and media football? *Policy Options*, April, 74-8.

Garman, J., 2009. This is not youthful rebellion. We see the catastrophe ahead. *The Observer* [online]. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/mar/08/activism-climate-change> [Accessed 11 May 2011].

Gillett, R., 2008. An Interview with Plane Stupid. *Scotland Indymedia* [online] <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/regions/scotland/2008/01/390311.html> [Accessed 11 May 2011].

Greenpeace UK, 2010. Coal [online]. <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/campaigns/climate-change/coal> [Accessed 11 May 2011].

Haas, P., 1992. Introduction: epistemic communities and international policy coordination. *International Organization*, 46 (1), 1-35.

Habermas, J., 1987. *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol.2: System and Lifeworld*. Cambridge: Polity.

Hodkinson, S., 2005. Inside The Murky World Of The UK's Make Poverty History Campaign. *Zcommunications* [online]. <http://www.zcommunications.org/inside-the-murky-world-of-the-uks-make-poverty-history-campaign-by-stuart-hodkinson> [Accessed 10 May 2011].

Hulme, M., 2010. Problems with making and governing global kinds of knowledge. *Global Environmental Change*, 20, 558-564.

Hulme, M., 2009. *Why We Disagree About Climate Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Indymedia UK, 2007. Day 6: Climate Camp's 24 hours of Direct Action. *Indymedia UK* [online]. <http://indymedia.org.uk/en/2007/08/378854.html> [Accessed 11 May 2011].

Jamison, A., 2001. *The Making of Green Knowledge: Environmental Politics and Cultural Transformation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

King, D., 2005. Science informing policy on climate change. In D. Helm (ed) *Climate-change Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 31-42.

Laclau, E., 2005. *On Populist Reason*. New York: Verso.

Latour, B., 2004. *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Levidow, L., 1999. Britain's biotechnology controversy: elusive science, contested expertise. *New Genetics and Society* 18 (1), 47-64.

Lockhart, A., 2009. Optimum Population Trust: a rebirth of 1970s survivalism, or something new?. *In-Spire: Journal of Law, Politics and Societies*, 4 (1), 19-39.

Lohmann, L., 2008. Carbon Trading, Climate Justice and the Production of Ignorance: Ten Examples. *Development* 51, 359-365.

Mason, P., 2004. Looking to the Hydrogen Horizon. *BBC News* [online], <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/3675760.stm> [Accessed 11 May 2011].

Melucci, A., 1986. *Nomads of the Present*. London: Radius.

Melucci, A., 1996. *Challenging Codes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

O'Reilly, J., Brysse, K., Oppenheimer, M., Oreskes, N., 2011. Characterising uncertainty in expert assessments: ozone depletion and the West Antarctic ice sheet. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*. 2, 728-743.

Oreskes N., Conway E., 2010. *Merchants of doubt: how a handful of scientists obscured the truth on Issues from tobacco smoke to global warming*. New York: Bloomsbury Books

Parson, E.A., Karwat, D., 2011. Sequential climate change policy. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 2, 744-756..

Plane Stupid, 2007. Climate Activists mark 10 years of Blair [online]. <http://www.planestupid.com/actions> [Accessed 11 May 2011].

Plows, A., 2003. *Praxis and practise: The 'What, How and Why' of the UK environmental direct action movement of the 1990s*. Thesis (PhD). University of Wales, Bangor.

Plows, A., 2008. Towards an Analysis of the "Success" of UK Green Protests. *British Politics*, 3 (1), 92-109.

Pusey A., Russell, B., 2011. the Climate Crisis or the Crisis of Climate Politics? *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory* [online]. <http://www.anarchiststudies.org/node/423> [Accessed on 1 November 2011].

Rancière, J., 2007. *On the Shores of Politics*. London: Verso.

Ravetz, J., 2004. The post-normal science of precaution. *Futures*, 36 (3), 347-357.

Readhead, P., 2007. Climate camps and campaign democracy. *Economic and Social Research Council: News Articles* [online].

http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/CI/CP/Our_Society_Today/News_Articles_2007/CampaignDemocracy.aspx [Accessed 11 May 2011].

Rootes, C., ed., 2003. *Environmental Protest in Western Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Saunders, C., 2008. Double-edged swords? Collective identity and solidarity in the environment movement. *British Journal of Sociology*, 59 (2), 227-253.

Saunders, C., 2010. Does Broad Participation Make De-radicalisation Inevitable? The Case of Climate Camps in the UK. *Paper prepared for the Political Studies Association*, Edinburgh, March 2010.

Saunders, C. and Price, S., 2009. One Person's Eu-topia, Another's Hell: Climate Camp as a Heterotopia. *Environmental Politics*, 18 (1), 117-122.

Schlembach, R., 2011. How do Radical Climate Movements Negotiate their Environmental and their Social Agendas? A Study of Debates within the Camp for Climate Action (UK). *Critical Social Policy*, 31 (2), 194-215.

Seel, B., Paterson, M. and Doherty, B., eds., 2000. *Direct Action in British Environmentalism*. Routledge: London and New York.

Shackley, S., Wynne, B., 1996. Representing uncertainty in global climate change policy. *Science, Technology and Human Values*, 21 (3), 275-302.

Skrimshire, S., 2008. Approaching the Tipping Point: Climate Risks, Faith and Political Action. *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 4 (2), 9-22.

Soroos, M., 2004. Science and International climate change policy. In: Harrison, N., Bryner, G., eds. *Science and Politics in the International Environment*. Oxford: Rowan and Littlefield.

Swyngedouw, E., 2008. Impossible Sustainability and the Post-Political Condition. In: D. Gibbs and R. Krueger, eds. *Sustainable Development*. New York: Guilford Press. 13-39.

The Coal Hole, 2010. James Hansen Would be a Cool Grandad [online]. Available from: <http://thecoalhole.org/?p=534> [Accessed 11 May 2011].

Touraine, A., 1981. *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Valentine, J., 2005. Rancière and Contemporary Political Problems, *Paragraph*, 28(1), 4-59.

Vaneigem, R., 1994. *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. London: RebelPress.

Webster, M., et al., 2011. Analysis of climate policy targets under uncertainty. *Climatic Change*, 104, 515-537.

Weichselgartner J., Kaspersen R., 2010. Barriers in the science-policy-practice interface: toward a knowledge-action-system in global environmental change research. *Global Environmental Change*, 20, 266-277.

Woodsworth, A., 2008. *Growth in the UK Climate Direct Action Movement: Experience, Politics and Practice*, Thesis (PhD). University of East Anglia.

Yearly, S., 1992. Green Ambivalence about Science: Legal-Rational Authority and the Scientific Legitimation of a Social Movement. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 43 (4), 511-532.

Yearley, S., 1996. Nature's advocates: putting science to work in environmental organisations. In: Irwin, A., Wynne, B., eds. *Misunderstanding science? The public reconstruction of science and technology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 172-190.

Yearly, S., 2008. Environmental action groups and other NGOs as communicators of science. In: Bucchi, M., Trench, B., eds. *Handbook of Public Communication of Science and Technology*. London: Routledge, 159-171.

Zizek, S., 1999. *Mapping Ideology*. London: Verso.